

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-8

HONOLULU STAR-BULLETIN
28 February 1978

SSC1

Newsmen Must Be Realistic About CIA

The problem of how to get along with the CIA abroad has been tormenting American journalists ever since the disclosure a few years ago that some journalists were getting along too well — the CIA was paying them.

The thought that reputable journalists could be regarded as part of the same lump with Tass correspondents, whom everyone is sure are Russian spies, sent shivers through all who care about the credibility of U.S. journalism.

It may even have inspired some of the Third World momentum to ban foreign correspondents and set up internal press bureaus to dole out government-approved press dispatches to the outer world.

Last year, when he was still chairing the Senate Intelligence Committee, Hawaii's Sen. Daniel K. Inouye assured the American Society of Newspaper Editors that the CIA in the future would have no paid or contractual relationship whatever with accredited U.S. correspondents abroad, including "stringers" or part-time contributors.

Last weekend in Honolulu, three top-flight Asian correspondents discussed the problem before a session of Asian and American journalists sponsored by the University of Hawaii and the Fellowship Program in Asian Studies funded by the Frank E. Gannett Newspaper Foundation.

Agreement was easy on one point about the relations of correspondents with the CIA abroad. You don't take pay — if you do you're a journalistic prostitute, said Keyes Beech, who served 30 years in Asia for the Chicago Daily News.

But what about accepting information from CIA sources or giving them information?

Dennis Bloodworth of the London Observer said British intelligence simplifies this problem. It keeps its agents under cover as diplomats, businessmen and the like, so you never know when you're talking to one.

The consequence is you accept his information with the same need to check it and be skeptical about it that you may feel from any other source. You also give information in only the normal exchange that necessarily takes place between a writer and his sources.

Since the CIA operates in the open abroad, or at least has acknowledged CIA men in many countries, the correspondent talking to an admitted CIA staffer must face the moral dilemma more directly.

The rule of giving or asking no more than from other sources seems a fair one, however.

To sever contact totally between the CIA and U.S. journalists abroad when both are in the business of collecting information would handicap both unnecessarily.

For journalists to deal with the CIA as with any other source seems reasonable.

No sound journalist writes anything of consequence without verifying it as best he can. If a CIA tip can be checked out, it should not be discarded because of the source. If a CIA man asks a question, it seems perfectly reasonable to give him any information the correspondent would also be willing to give to anybody else.

file